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CUI BONO?: INVESTIGATING BENEFITS AND INTERESTS IN EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH

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For Herbert Radcliffe-Brown
and Phyllis Radcliffe-Brown (*née* Churchill),
beloved parents and grandparents
of the editors

*How many hopes and fears, how many ardent wishes
and anxious apprehensions are twisted together in the threads
that connect the parent with the child.*

(Samuel Griswold Goodrich; cited in Boulander, 1972, p. 195)

*In many classificatory systems the terms for grandfather and
grandmother are used in this way, as implying a general attitude of
friendliness, relatively free from restraint, towards all persons to
whom they are applied. Grandparents and grandchildren are persons
with whom one can be on free and easy terms. This is concerned with
an extremely widespread, indeed almost universal, way of organising
the relation of alternate generations to one another.*

(Radcliffe-Brown, 1952, p. 79)

I

As is often the case, the genesis for this edited collection of journal articles was serendipitous. The second editor had despatched copies of some recent publications to international contacts with a shared involvement in researching the education of occupational Travellers (see Moriarty & Hallinan and Anteliz, Danaher & Danaher, this volume). Dr Martin

Levinson acknowledged receipt of the publications in an electronic mail message (personal communication, 5 March 2001), and in so doing raised the following point:

... I must confess that some time before the completion of my own research project I was beginning to distance myself from many of the other researchers in the field. That is not to say that I do not respect their contribution My reservations grew, nevertheless, as I became more deeply involved with Travellers themselves. The feeling tended to be that they were excluded from the dialectic concerning their own lives. There was a feeling that for all the papers and conferences, little had been achieved here [in England] to improve the situation with regard to site provision and access to health and education. Finally, despite all the meetings I had attended, it struck me that the convictions of certain academics as to what was best for the travelling community were not necessarily shared by the group in question.

Levinson's comments resonated with (although they did not necessarily derive from the same assumptions) enduring and seemingly intensifying criticisms of educational research by government and business. Pring (2000) provided a useful synthesis of those criticisms:

- (i) too small-scale and fragmented, constructed on different data bases, such that it is not possible to draw the 'big picture';
 - (ii) non-cumulative, failing to progress on the basis of previous research, for ever reinventing the wheel;
 - (iii) ideologically driven, serving the 'political purposes' of the researcher rather than the disinterested pursuit of the truth;
 - (iv) methodologically 'soft' or 'flawed', without the rigour either in the conduct of the research or in the reporting of it;
 - (v) inaccessible in esoteric journals and in opaque language.
- (p. 156)

It is encouraging to compare this list with the finding of a recent review of Australian educational research [Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs, 2000] that such research 'is respected internationally and makes a difference in the worlds of schools, and policy development' [p. 4].

Some initial comments about the litany of complaints summarised by Pring (2000), particularly when considered in juxtaposition with Levinson's remarks, are in order:

- As with many such generalisations, there are elements of truth in the critique, whose components provide a timely checklist against which to interrogate our respective research endeavours.
- It is appropriate that the same interrogation be directed at the critique itself.
- The culturally, economically and politically elevated status of the critique's proponents renders it powerful and potentially dangerous.
- Given the increased reach of government and business in contemporary universities (Danaher, Gale & Erben, 2000, pp. 56-58), claims such as these have a direct impact on the professional lives of educational researchers.
- Perhaps most crucially, despite some superficial similarities between Levinson's comments (which echo many of Pring's [2000] concerns) and the critique by government and business, we see a fundamental contradiction between the two. In particular, Levinson implied that educational research should lead to direct benefits for marginalised groups such as Travellers, rather than or perhaps as well as promoting the interests of researchers. By contrast, the government and business critique created an implicit dichotomy between researchers' interests (assumed to be narrow and hence selfish) and what is often termed 'the common good' or 'the national interest' (held to represent the aspirations of all citizens, whether national, regional or global).

We are ambivalent about this implicit dichotomy between educational researchers and the broader community. On the one hand, we acknowledge that academics *do* have vested interests, that such interests contribute to their accumulation of particular kinds of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1988), and that the contemporary university environment makes it even more important to acknowledge and review such capital. Indeed, one of the intended outcomes of this collection is to provide multiple interrogations of the interests of educational researchers. On the other hand, as we noted above, the purveyors of the critique synthesised – but by no means endorsed – by Pring (2000) occupy powerful ‘speaking positions’. Consequently there is little evidence to date of an equivalent scrutiny of the ideological constructions of expressions like ‘the common good’ and ‘the national interest’. Furthermore, this lack of scrutiny of the many and often conflicting interests conveyed – or disguised – by such expressions is likely to perpetuate the situation conveyed by Levinson, in which the powerful have their interests promoted while the less powerful are rendered inaudible and invisible.

There are, of course, many ways of responding to the two challenges provoked by the very different kinds of concerns of marginalised groups like Travellers and powerful forces such as government and business. One such response is the claim that universities can and should reconceptualise the kind of knowledge that they help to produce. According to Gibbons, Limoges, Nowotny, Schwartzman, Scott and Trow (1994), the traditional form of knowledge construction in universities – what they called ‘Mode 1’ – has given way, at least in some fields and sites, to ‘Mode 2’, which is:

Knowledge production carried out in the *context of application* and marked by its: *transdisciplinarity*; *heterogeneity*; organisational heterarchy and transience; social accountability and *reflexivity*; and quality control which emphasises context- and use-dependence. Results from the parallel expansion of

knowledge producers and users in society. (p. 167; emphasis in original)

Once again we are ambivalent about this kind of pronouncement. On the one hand, we endorse, and seek to centre our own work on, principles of '*transdisciplinarity; heterogeneity; ... and reflexivity*', not least because they demand explicit attention being accorded to those whose voices are often not heard in educational research. In the same vein, we approve the principle of 'the parallel expansion of knowledge producers and users in society' — that is, the decentring of universities as the sole authorised site of knowledge construction. On the other hand, our experience and that of many colleagues in Australia and internationally is that universities are remarkably resistant of such decentring. Also, but from a different perspective, we reject efforts to devalue the distinctive contribution that university academics can and do make to knowledge production, partly because such a devaluing smacks of an élitist anti-intellectualism under the guise of revolutionary populism.

Rather than following the 'Mode 2' path (which in any case seems to us excessively dichotomised *contra* 'Mode 1'), therefore, we prefer to pursue the common concept underpinning the two challenges to educational researchers identified above: interests. Here we reveal our shared enthusiasm for reading detective fiction as an explanation of the title of this collection of articles. '*Cui bono?*' is a question posed by detectives in the novels that we both enjoy so much. For example, Donna Leon's (1997) character, the Venetian Commissario Guido Brunetti, was accustomed to identifying the interested parties in a murder investigation:

He had also learned, during the years he had practised this profession of his, that the important trail was the one left by money. The place where it began was usually a given: the person from whom the money was taken, either by force or by craft. The other end, where the trail finished, was the difficult

one to find, just as it was the more vital one, for it was there that would also be found the person who has practised the craft or the force. *Cui bono?* (p. 30)

And later in the investigation:

Cui bono? Cui bono? All that remained was to discover who stood to profit from the deaths, and the path would open before him, as if illuminated by torchbearing seraphim, and lead him to the killer. (p. 256)

In a similar vein, M. M. Kaye (1985) has one of her characters say at the end of *Death in the Andamans*: '*Cui bono?*' is apt to be shouted a bit after a murder, and I imagine '*the victim of blackmail*' is as good an answer as any' (p. 298).

Our enjoyment of detective fiction aside, we consider the question '*Cui bono?*' – understood as 'Who benefits?' or 'In whose interests?' – as one of the most enduringly significant questions to be directed at an educational research project. We don't for one moment believe that the answers to that question will remain the same over space and time, or that they should necessarily do so. Indeed, another of the intended outcomes of this collection of articles is to map and celebrate the diversity and heterogeneity of the respective authors' research projects. A valuable corollary of that mapping and celebration, in our view, is the revelation of multiple understandings and experiences of 'research', 'benefits' and 'interests'.

Despite the differences of approach and emphasis among the articles, those articles are united in their authors' deployment of various conceptual resources to frame their respective responses to '*Cui bono?*' about their research endeavours. The importance of this approach cannot be overstated: we are convinced that engagements with that crucial question not only can, but must, be as theoretically informed as they are empirically grounded and methodologically charged. Such an approach is a potentially effective counter to the anti-intellectualism alluded to earlier; it

is also an appropriate and necessary answer to what we consider the more socially just concerns of Levinson.

Part of the reason for our conviction of the utility and necessity of theory in identifying the benefits and interests of educational research is centred on our conceptualisation of theory. Here we follow Pring (2000), who argued that theory is understood 'as opposed to common sense or practical understandings and the validity or truth of theoretical explanations' (p. 58), and who noted furthermore:

Theory here, then, refers to the articulation of the framework of beliefs and understandings which are embedded in the practice we engage in. Such a theoretical position may be expressed in everyday, non-theoretical language. But, none the less, it is what we bring to our observation of the world and to the interpretation of those observations. It involves a more or less coherent account of the values and motivations, of human capacities and aspirations. And such an account, when articulated, is open to critical scrutiny. (p. 77)

Given our earlier concerns about the government and business critique of educational research, it is apposite to cite here Pring's pithy assertion: 'Secretaries of State, politicians and the various lobby groups which advise them are against theory' [p. 76].

Understood from this perspective, theory performs a number of vital functions in educational research:

- theory works for researchers rather than *vice versa*
- theory occupies a dialectical and iterative relationship with data
- theory helps to hold researchers accountable to research participants and other stakeholders
- theory assists in interrogating the otherwise unexamined assumptions of 'common sense' understandings of the world

- theory allows links to be made among seemingly disparate groups, by naming and reflecting their shared experiences
- theory contributes to identifying and evaluating the interests served or not served by particular phenomena.

In other words, far from being irrelevant or an impediment to the construction of productive knowledge, theory is vital to that construction being not only rigorous and trustworthy but also ethically appropriate and politically responsible.

This reference to ethics reminds us that the questions about the value of educational research raised by Levinson's comments reported at the beginning of this paper are, above all else, *ethical* questions. He pondered, rightly, on who benefits from Traveller education research projects and whose interests are and are not served by such projects. Flinders (1992) elaborated a well-known model of four ethical frameworks: utilitarian, deontological, relational and ecological. He traced each framework to a particular combination of ideologically framed assumptions about the world, social life, the purposes of education and the functions of research. Again our ambivalence shows through. On the one hand, Flinders's model exemplifies the kinds of links among theory, method and data that we believe should be more, not less, prominent in educational research. On the other hand, such a framework tends inevitably towards undergoing a fixed rather than a dynamic application; we prefer to emphasise the changeable and multiple dimensions of educational research ethics.

It is possible that Martin Levinson would be surprised and not a little dismayed that our response to his personal communication is to have worked with the authors to produce yet another academic publication. Nevertheless we hope that he would accept that this issue of the *Queensland Journal of Educational Research* is a serious engagement with the question '*Cui bono?*'. Our respective investigations of the benefits and interests in educational research might even strike some chords with government and business. We would be delighted if those

striking chords included the understanding that such benefits and interests require ongoing scrutiny, framed by theory and underpinned by ethics. After all, that approach is the one taken by all the best fictional detectives.

II

When the idea was mooted of engaging with the question ‘*Cui bono?*’ as the focus of this special theme issue of the *Queensland Journal of Educational Research*, more than a dozen people expressed interest in being part of the project. Since each author was free to choose his or her own topic, as is only to be expected there has been considerable variety in the final outcome. However, the authors are all committed to their focus on the central theme. In producing their articles, moreover, they have also pondered the question of who will be likely to benefit from a particular area of research, and why and how such benefits (or in some cases, perhaps, detriments) might occur.

Six guide questions were posed to assist the authors to remain on track, though it was by no means obligatory that they should respond to all of them. These questions focused on what is understood by educational research and research benefit; the relationship between the research and selected conceptual resources; and what the researcher has discovered from these resources about their relationship with the researched. Finally the authors were asked to consider possible implications for research benefits in terms of current university governance and funding.

The eight articles that have evolved from this process of inquiry, in the view of the editors, represent a potent and pertinent range of responses to the issues of educational research. At the same time, there is a common thread throughout the journal issue that allows us all as researchers to reflect on what we are doing, why and how we are engaged in the process, and whether our chosen areas of research can

produce something of value, for our stakeholders as well as for ourselves.

The editors have made every effort to achieve a balance to include a number of educational institutions. This has been problematic to a degree with three authors having to withdraw from the project. Their replacements at short notice have, of necessity, been recruited from Central Queensland University, but both these respondents have been involved with other institutions in writing the postgraduate dissertations on which their articles are based: Jeanne McConachie with Southern Cross University and Sue McIntosh with Deakin University. Similarly, Mike Danaher is currently completing his doctoral studies on environmental issues in Japan under the auspices of Griffith University in Queensland. Lucy Jarzabkowski, who lectures at Murdoch University in Western Australia, completed her PhD at the University of Canberra. Co-author Emilio Alexis Anteliz heads a division at the Universidad Central de Venezuela in Caracas, while Dr Máirín Kenny, the respondent for this issue, is an independent scholar associated with Trinity College, Dublin.

The process involved in producing a theme edition of the *Queensland Journal of Educational Research* deserves some comment. Once the authors had been approached and had agreed to contribute articles about educational research related to the central question '*Cui bono?*', the editors deemed it to be important to arrange for the authors to meet at two fairly widely spaced teleconferences. These took place at the Rockhampton campus of Central Queensland University on 25 June and 12 November 2001. Ideally, more meetings would have been a useful option, but factors of distance, workloads and lecturing commitments, among others, made this impossible to achieve. However, a real bonus was that our respondent, Dr Máirín Kenny, happened to be visiting Australia during November 2001 and was thus able to attend our second meeting. During the meetings and in subsequent face-to-face, telephone or e-mail conversations, work in

progress was shared and plenty of worthwhile dialogue occurred among the participants. It was on these occasions that we all became aware of the fascinating web of connections that exist among the contributors' areas of research, the conceptual resources used and the articles as they were completed.

As papers were completed they were submitted to the editors for comments and suggestions, and then passed on to the respondent. A logical sequence seemed to emerge; hence the choice of order of presentation in this edition. The first two contributions (by Lucy Jarzabkowski and Bobby Harreveld) are concerned with issues arising from research with current and prospective teachers in the primary and adult literacy spheres respectively. Sue McIntosh's research on critical writing pedagogy for adult learners also focuses on the theme of literacy and introduces the concept of 'researched as researchers' that is elaborated in the paper by Jenny Simpson and Phyllida Coombes on the Hero's Journey and transformational learning. With Mike Danaher's article we move into a new realm, indeed to another country, where the author explores the educational implications of research on environmental lobbyists in Japan. We return to Australia with Jeanne McConachie's article, but now the focus is on enterprise systems for tertiary institutions, a vital area of research in this technological age. In the two final papers the educational interests of two groups of occupational Travellers are considered: circus workers (Beverley Moriarty and Peter Hallinan) and fairground people (Emilio Alexis Anteliz, Geoffrey Radcliffe Danaher and Patrick Alan Danaher). The benefits of the research are indeed widespread.

All of this seems an appropriate response to Southworth's (1987) not entirely rhetorical question and to his alternative metaphor to our emphasis on detective fiction:

Another metaphor to use for our fieldwork might be that of the Stock Exchange and insider dealings. Maybe we, as fieldworkers, were insider dealers; if so, who profits? (p. 88)

The articles in this collection, and the concluding piece by the respondent, provide thoughtful, theoretically informed responses to that enduringly significant question. '*Cui bono?*', indeed.

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